

Remarks by
Dr. Donald C. Winter
Secretary of Navy
Navy Birthday Celebration
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Ladies and gentleman, I am very pleased to join you tonight in celebrating the Navy's 231st birthday, and paying tribute to the many heroes of the Cold War.

It is hard to think about the Cold War without thinking about one of the key figures in that long struggle—Ronald Reagan. He was one of the few people who believed that the Cold War could be won—and that we should try to win it.

Sometimes, he was even ridiculed for his views. Especially when he dared to speak frankly about the nature of the Soviet regime.

As passionate and serious as President Reagan was in his opposition to totalitarianism, however, he also had a lighter side. He delighted, as many of you might know, in telling jokes. And he particularly enjoyed telling jokes about Communism whenever he met with Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev. This used to drive Gorbachev crazy.

Now remember, in the Soviet Union everyone told jokes making fun of communism—even Communist Party members. Reagan knew that in a totalitarian society, jokes were the only permissible form of truth-telling.

One of Reagan's favorite stories concerned a man who wanted to buy an automobile. So he went to the Soviet bureau of transportation to order one. He was informed that he would have to pay for it now, but that there was a 10-year wait for delivery. So the man began to fill out all the forms. He goes from one agency to the next with his paperwork. At last he arrives at the final step, and he pays the money.

Then he is told, "OK, come back in 10 years and you can get your car." The man then asks, "Morning or afternoon?"

The man in the agency says, "What difference does it make?" And the man answers, "Because the plumber is coming in the morning."

Communism was, in fact, a colossal failure and it is easy to make fun of the dysfunctional nature of command economies. But there is a serious point to be made as well, and Soviet tyranny was no laughing matter. The existence of the Gulag was just one indicator that there was no political freedom under Communism. The shortages of everyday consumer items, black markets, and a striking absence of prosperity all pointed

to the bleak reality that there was no economic freedom either. This situation applied to all communist societies without exception.

A few years ago, a famous photo of the Korean peninsula at night, taken from space, was widely distributed. In the South, on the side of freedom, there are thousands of bright lights dotting the map. In the communist North, the moment you cross the DMZ, not a sign of life disturbs a vast sea of night.

That photo is a wonderful illustration of what each side represents—the light of freedom and restless activity, and the darkness of a totalitarian system that crushes the human spirit.

The Cold War was, indeed, a noble struggle between two incompatible systems. And the side of freedom won.

The images we have of the Cold War still resonate in the American consciousness. Winston Churchill in Fulton, Missouri, declaring that “From Stettin in the Baltic to Trieste in the Adriatic an iron curtain has descended across the Continent.”

Khrushchev at the United Nations, pounding his shoe on the table and promising, “We will bury you!” The Cuban Missile Crisis. Schoolchildren hiding under their desks, practicing nuclear emergency drills. The Berlin Wall, with guard towers and machine guns aimed at those who dreamed of escaping to the side of freedom.

President Reagan at the Brandenburg Gate, dramatically appealing to the Soviet leader and the world, “Come here to this gate! Mr. Gorbachev, open this gate! Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall!”

Many look back at the Cold War as a great victory that was won without a shot being fired. But it was not a war without loss. Thousands died during this nearly five-decades-long conflict. The Korean War was a product of the Cold War, as was the Vietnam War.

Many Americans died in operations that remain, even to this day, unacknowledged, entailing heroism and loss that have yet to be revealed to a grateful nation. We should remember and honor those whose sacrifices brought about a victorious conclusion to the Cold War, to the enormous betterment of the United States and the world.

Cold War warriors have now entered the history books for their roles in conquering tyranny and freeing millions from communist servitude. Today we are engaged in a similar struggle—global, ideological, and fraught with peril.

The global jihadist insurgency is quite open in its goals, and equally clear in its determination to wage war against us. It took many decades to prevail against the Soviet Union, and this war is likely to be a long war as well.

Today, as in President Reagan's day, there are those who say that this is a war that cannot be won, and that we must acquiesce to the enemies of freedom. Such naive thinking has never worked. It did not work in 1938; it did not work during the Cold War; and it will not work against the enemy we face today.

This war must be fought, and it will be won with the same spirit of determination and courage that led to victory in the Cold War.

Warfighters far from home—on an oil platform off the coast of Iraq, at an isolated communications station in the Indian Ocean, onboard an aircraft carrier in the Pacific Ocean, or in a remote desert area of Afghanistan—are waging war tonight against enemies determined to change our way of life.

During the Cold War, many families did not know where their loved ones had gone to carry out their missions. But they kept their support strong and unwavering.

Today our Sailors and Marines still depend on the support of their loved ones at home to sustain them during difficult times. The families who stand by the side of those who serve have earned our gratitude and thanks.

We are engaged in a noble mission—just like those who fought for freedom during the long years of superpower struggle. The Navy and Marine Corps have protected America from its enemies from the very beginnings, and our unique capabilities as a forward-deployed force will continue to serve the nation's interests in today's great conflict.

Tonight let us celebrate the victory of freedom in the Cold War. Let us take quiet pride in our role as defenders of a great nation. Let us resolve to be worthy of the sacrifices made by all those who have died or were wounded preserving the blessings of liberty. And let us carry on Ronald Reagan's vision of America as a city upon a hill, a shining beacon of light to the world.

Thank you, all of you, for your service. It is an honor to serve as your Secretary.